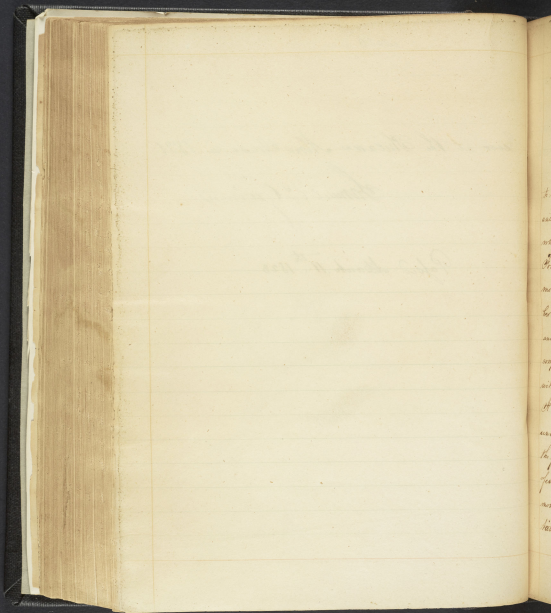


Given at the Thirde Annual Meeting in 1821

Samuel C. Swinney

Passed March 11<sup>th</sup> 1823







*Fever at the Philad<sup>a</sup> Almshouse in 1821.*

This was a bilious fever, of an aggravated character, which appears to have been confined to a particular class of inhabitants in this city and Liberties, viz the most indigent and miserable of the negroes; from which circumstances it received the popular name of the "black fever." For several successive years it has prevailed among them with great mortality; during the last season I recollect having seen a great number of cases of this description, while attending the practice of the House, and very many fell victims to it. I shall attempt to give a sketch of this complaint as it presented itself to my own immediate view this season, with the comparative effect of the different remedies employed for the cure. It was about the latter end of May that the first patients labouring under this disease were admitted into the Philadelphia Almshouse; the few first cases having the well marked character of ordinary bilious fever, excited no suspicion, and were in fact easily treated by the common depletion means. As the weather became warmer, the number of patients considerably increased, accompanied with a corresponding degree







of malignancy, until the beginning of July, when it suffered a shock,  
seemingly in consequence of the weather becoming suddenly very cool. During  
this period however, a great many patients were received into this  
Institution. The disease as has already been stated, prevails prin-  
cipally among the lowest class of the blacks; and its prevalence among them  
has been attributed (and no doubt with much propriety) to indolent  
and intemperate habits of life, to which they are naturally disposed;  
to which may be added a dirty and unwholesome diet, and a total disre-  
gard to cleanliness, both personal and in their habitations.

Another vice to which they are addicted, is drunkenness; they take but  
little substantial food, drink to excess, and during a state of intoxication  
not unfrequently expose themselves to the scorching rays of the sun by  
day, and at night to the noxious exposure at this time descending, by ly-  
ing before the doors of their miserable habitations.

They are often crowded together in the narrow and dirty alleys of the  
Liberties particularly in confined places, where not unfrequently two  
or three families of these unhappy beings exist in a space so small as  
must scarcely make us many individuals comfortable. There are many  
other vices and irregularities are fruitful sources of so much sickness  
and death, when they prevail in so high a degree. The disease once







existed, suddenly prostrated the powers of life to such a degree, as to defy all our efforts to subdue it unless timely attended to; this melancholy fact was but too frequently exemplified during its prevalence.

Another cause of its mortality was want of medical attention in proper time, and other accommodations to render their situation comfortable. In consequence of extreme poverty they seldom solicited medical aid, and often their situation was not made known to the Guardians of the Poor, until they were beyond all hopes of recovery. Such being the fact, they were not unfrequently brought here in so low a state, that many died a few hours after admission, and several, to the no small degree of surprise of the dragmen, were found dead in the carts on their arrival here.

I shall now endeavour to describe the symptoms and progress of the disease, as well as circumstances will admit. It was almost impossible to gain any satisfactory information from the patients themselves, in consequence of the disturbed state of their minds. From such however, as could describe <sup>their</sup> feelings about the time of the attack, it appeared, that a few days, sometimes but a few hours preceding that event, the patient felt a general lassitude or weariness and drowsiness, with alternate sensations of heat



By  
 time  
 go  
 in a  
 org  
 118  
 and  
 free  
 was  
 the  
 being  
 life  
 him  
 to the



and cold. Sometimes the attack was more sudden, and was announced by a smart chill, followed by intense heat of the body, extreme thirst, violent pain in the head, back and loins, hurried respiration, nausea and vomiting. Such was the nature of the attack. In a short time the Epigastric region became very tender and painful, which gradually increased and extended over the whole abdomen, and in some instances was so exquisite as to cause the patient to cry out on the slightest pressure being applied to the part.

The pulse was commonly small, quick and frequent, beating from 110 to 140 strokes per minute, and easily compressed; the tongue was covered with a yellowish fur; the eyes from a reddish appearance, gradually assumed a deep yellow colour; the skin was tinged with the same, as were very evident in the mucous membranes. The bowels were very costive, the urine high coloured and scanty.

The above symptoms increased very rapidly, with slight remissions, and would in a little time destroy the patient unassisted by medical interference.

The vomiting was often distressing, and the gastric irritation so considerable, that even the mildest substances taken into the stomach were immediately ejected. Although there was



*[Faint, illegible handwriting in cursive script, likely a letter or journal entry.]*

*[Faint, illegible handwriting on the right edge of the page, possibly from the reverse side or a marginal note.]*



after considerable derangement of the intellectual faculties, there was seldom much delirium; more frequently the patients were in a comatose state, and when roused up would often describe their feelings with seeming perspicacity. If the disease was not checked in its career, the fatal symptoms quickly appeared, such as laborious respiration, heaving and oppression of the chest, cold clammy sweats, cold extremities, total insensibility to all external impressions, hiccough with a feeble and tremulous pulse. At this stage, the tongue was often quite hard, dry and contracted, and almost black; the mouth and fauces were parched and dry, with a large collection of mucus in the larynx and gurgles.

The muscular strength in the advanced stage, was in some cases astonishing; the patients would rise out of bed, and go on the stool stool undisturbed, a few hours before death. On two instances I witnessed with surprise, patients almost pulseless, get out of bed, walk across the floor, they returned again to their beds and expired in the act of lying down. This extraordinary degree of muscular strength was always an unfavorable symptom, and invariably foreshadowed approaching dissolution.







Assisted by my friend Doctor Lawrence, I examined the major-  
ity of those that died. We uniformly found the stomach in a  
state of inflammation, varying however in degree. In a few  
cases it contained a quantity of dark coloured slimy fluid  
of a peculiar and somewhat offensive smell; this was con-  
sidered an effusion of blood mixed with the natural secretion  
of this organ, by an experienced practitioner who was present  
at one of the examinations. Often the inflammation exten-  
ded to the duodenum; and in one instance the whole tract  
of the intestinal canal was highly inflamed, being of a  
dark colour, and crowded with distended blood vessels, having  
as the stomach, a similar appearance of effused blood on their  
inner surface.

The Liver, though deranged in its function, presented no trace  
of organic disease in its structure, that the eye could detect,  
except in a few instances it seemed rather soft; its ducts were  
likewise unaffected. The thoracic viscera were in a sound state.  
Occasionally we found the vessels of the brain unnaturally  
distended with blood; and the ventricles containing more fluid  
than is usual, otherwise it seemed perfectly natural in appearance.







and structure. The stomach appears to have been the primary seat of this complaint, and to it most of the painful and distressing sensations of the patients themselves were referred. L

I shall now consider the remedies employed for its cure. From what has already been said, it must appear evident, that the stage in which general depletion would have been most beneficial, had in the majority of cases elapsed previous to the patient being admitted into this Institution; this being the fact, we were in a great measure deprived of the use of this active remedy; but whenever the state of the patient would admit, recourse was had to the lancet with the most happy effect.

The first indication, was to allay the gastric irritation, which commonly was one of the first symptoms, and frequently continued more or less till the patient came here; for this purpose the various anti-emetic remedies such as the Neutral Mixture, the effervescing draught, lime water and milk, Soda Water &c. were employed; sometimes either of these would succeed, more commonly all would fail; under such circumstances a large blister applied immediately over the Epigastric region invariably checked it, provided it produced vesication.







If the considerable pain existed in the part, local bleeding was directed previous to its application. Having composed the stomach, the alimentary canal next claimed attention; to evacuate their contents, eight or ten grains of calomel were first given to the patient and followed up by small doses of some other purgative, as an infusion of senna, solution of Epsom salts or Castor oil &c as one or the other proved less offensive to the stomach, until three or four copious evacuations should be procured which were generally of a black colour and very offensive smell. If the last purgatives were all rejected, calomel in smaller doses was repeated alone, until the bowels were sufficiently moved. If the pain in the head was not relieved after the operation of the cathartic, blood was freely drawn from the forehead and temples with the cups and scarificator, which frequently gave relief; if not, a blister applied between the shoulders seldom failed. As aforesaid in allaying the pain and swelling, warm fomentations were also applied to the abdomen, with much benefit to the sufferer, the bowels were kept in a soluble state throughout the course of the disease, with some suitable medicine.

If the remedies I have mentioned failed to produce a mitigation







of the disease, Bleeds were applied to the extremities, and sweating has resorted to, which operated like a charm in checking the fever, provided it was general. Should all our means however prove unavailing, the system would sink rapidly, and symptoms of great prostration come on, when it became necessary to support the system. For this purpose the Carbonate of ammonia, with a liberal quantity of wine, whey, milk punch or ardent spirits, together with small doses of a decoction of serpentaria frequently repeated, were found most effectual.

Frictions to the extremities were likewise very serviceable at this period, with the Liniment of Sassafras, or a decoction of brackenroot in spirits of turpentine, which created a heat and glow in the parts. As a stimulant, trial was likewise made of the spirits of turpentine taken internally, but with no evident advantage.

By steadily persevering in the above plan of treatment, adopting our remedies to the particular circumstances of the case, it was gratifying occasionally to see a patient recover, under circumstances the most unfavorable. During the convalescent state, which was often slow and protracted, with disposition to relapse, the Vegetable tonic medicines were given, variously combined, with







the addition of aromatics, together with a liberal quantity of portee, which the patients generally preferred to every other kind of liquor. The diet also, was adapted to the condition of the patient.

This was the method of treatment pursued, when the fever first made its appearance; but was on the whole very unsuccessful, many having fallen victims to the disease. Happily a more successful remedy presented itself. A sigilla having unequivocally taken place in one of my patients after the exhibition of mercurial cathartics, I was immediately struck at its sudden effect in arresting the progress of the complaint. This patient also had a rapid recovery. To satisfy myself as to the influence of mercury, over this disease, I resolved to give it a fair trial, as our success hitherto had been very discouraging.

After the bowels had been freely evacuated, and the ordinary applications made to the local symptoms, I commenced giving the calomel with the view of exciting salivation as speedily as possible. For this purpose two or three grains of calomel were directed, every second, fourth or sixth hour, according to the urgency of the symptoms. If the mercurial action could be



*[Faint, illegible handwriting, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*



excited, it always cured the disease. I cannot call to mind  
a single instance where it failed. Unfortunately however, this  
divisible and could not always be affecting the susceptibility  
of the system to the impression of our remedies appeared to be  
entirely destroyed in some cases, particularly such as were of  
considerable duration, in which no medicine whatever was of any  
service.

Was a salivation necessary for the cure of this disease? So far  
as my very limited experience has gone, I should answer in  
the affirmative. If the system did not feel the influence of the  
remedy, it was of no benefit, though liberally taken, but if  
the mercurial action could be excited, it invariably checked  
the progress of the complaint, and ultimately proved suc-  
cessful. It also secured the patient against the relapses  
which before were so apt to occur.

I have reference to mercury as a remedy in this disease  
as it presented itself to our notice, but under all circumstances  
would not consider it essentially necessary for the cure. On  
the contrary, if the complaint were treated in its first stage  
by bleedings, purging, assisted by such medicines as determine







to the skin, I am fully confident they would be attended with a favourable result; this is confirmed by the testimony of several practitioners, who informed me that the antiphlogistic plan succeeded with them in the first stage of the disease.

In the treatment of fevers generally, the least marks first in the list of our remedies, and should always be kept in view. Experience has proved it one of the most certain and efficacious means we possess, and when judiciously managed, equally safe; but it is in the commencement only, that it can be carried to a sufficient extent to be of essential and permanent benefit in a disease like the present, whose attack was sudden and severe, whose course was very rapid, and in a short time proved fatal.

This important period having elapsed, our means of cure became more limited and uncertain; it was here mercury displayed its powers, and was in fact the only medicine in which any degree of confidence could be placed.

In the foregoing short and general account of this fatal disease, I have confided myself solely to the narrative of facts



The number of days the water continued on the 1st  
of January the 2nd of January the 3rd of January  
the 4th of January the 5th of January the 6th of January  
the 7th of January the 8th of January the 9th of January  
the 10th of January the 11th of January the 12th of January  
the 13th of January the 14th of January the 15th of January  
the 16th of January the 17th of January the 18th of January  
the 19th of January the 20th of January the 21st of January  
the 22nd of January the 23rd of January the 24th of January  
the 25th of January the 26th of January the 27th of January  
the 28th of January the 29th of January the 30th of January  
the 31st of January the 1st of February the 2nd of February  
the 3rd of February the 4th of February the 5th of February  
the 6th of February the 7th of February the 8th of February  
the 9th of February the 10th of February the 11th of February  
the 12th of February the 13th of February the 14th of February  
the 15th of February the 16th of February the 17th of February  
the 18th of February the 19th of February the 20th of February  
the 21st of February the 22nd of February the 23rd of February  
the 24th of February the 25th of February the 26th of February  
the 27th of February the 28th of February the 29th of February  
the 1st of March the 2nd of March the 3rd of March  
the 4th of March the 5th of March the 6th of March  
the 7th of March the 8th of March the 9th of March  
the 10th of March the 11th of March the 12th of March  
the 13th of March the 14th of March the 15th of March  
the 16th of March the 17th of March the 18th of March  
the 19th of March the 20th of March the 21st of March  
the 22nd of March the 23rd of March the 24th of March  
the 25th of March the 26th of March the 27th of March  
the 28th of March the 29th of March the 30th of March  
the 31st of March the 1st of April the 2nd of April  
the 3rd of April the 4th of April the 5th of April  
the 6th of April the 7th of April the 8th of April  
the 9th of April the 10th of April the 11th of April  
the 12th of April the 13th of April the 14th of April  
the 15th of April the 16th of April the 17th of April  
the 18th of April the 19th of April the 20th of April  
the 21st of April the 22nd of April the 23rd of April  
the 24th of April the 25th of April the 26th of April  
the 27th of April the 28th of April the 29th of April  
the 30th of April the 1st of May the 2nd of May  
the 3rd of May the 4th of May the 5th of May  
the 6th of May the 7th of May the 8th of May  
the 9th of May the 10th of May the 11th of May  
the 12th of May the 13th of May the 14th of May  
the 15th of May the 16th of May the 17th of May  
the 18th of May the 19th of May the 20th of May  
the 21st of May the 22nd of May the 23rd of May  
the 24th of May the 25th of May the 26th of May  
the 27th of May the 28th of May the 29th of May  
the 30th of May the 31st of May the 1st of June  
the 2nd of June the 3rd of June the 4th of June  
the 5th of June the 6th of June the 7th of June  
the 8th of June the 9th of June the 10th of June  
the 11th of June the 12th of June the 13th of June  
the 14th of June the 15th of June the 16th of June  
the 17th of June the 18th of June the 19th of June  
the 20th of June the 21st of June the 22nd of June  
the 23rd of June the 24th of June the 25th of June  
the 26th of June the 27th of June the 28th of June  
the 29th of June the 30th of June the 1st of July  
the 2nd of July the 3rd of July the 4th of July  
the 5th of July the 6th of July the 7th of July  
the 8th of July the 9th of July the 10th of July  
the 11th of July the 12th of July the 13th of July  
the 14th of July the 15th of July the 16th of July  
the 17th of July the 18th of July the 19th of July  
the 20th of July the 21st of July the 22nd of July  
the 23rd of July the 24th of July the 25th of July  
the 26th of July the 27th of July the 28th of July  
the 29th of July the 30th of July the 31st of July  
the 1st of August the 2nd of August the 3rd of August  
the 4th of August the 5th of August the 6th of August  
the 7th of August the 8th of August the 9th of August  
the 10th of August the 11th of August the 12th of August  
the 13th of August the 14th of August the 15th of August  
the 16th of August the 17th of August the 18th of August  
the 19th of August the 20th of August the 21st of August  
the 22nd of August the 23rd of August the 24th of August  
the 25th of August the 26th of August the 27th of August  
the 28th of August the 29th of August the 30th of August  
the 31st of August the 1st of September the 2nd of September  
the 3rd of September the 4th of September the 5th of September  
the 6th of September the 7th of September the 8th of September  
the 9th of September the 10th of September the 11th of September  
the 12th of September the 13th of September the 14th of September  
the 15th of September the 16th of September the 17th of September  
the 18th of September the 19th of September the 20th of September  
the 21st of September the 22nd of September the 23rd of September  
the 24th of September the 25th of September the 26th of September  
the 27th of September the 28th of September the 29th of September  
the 30th of September the 1st of October the 2nd of October  
the 3rd of October the 4th of October the 5th of October  
the 6th of October the 7th of October the 8th of October  
the 9th of October the 10th of October the 11th of October  
the 12th of October the 13th of October the 14th of October  
the 15th of October the 16th of October the 17th of October  
the 18th of October the 19th of October the 20th of October  
the 21st of October the 22nd of October the 23rd of October  
the 24th of October the 25th of October the 26th of October  
the 27th of October the 28th of October the 29th of October  
the 30th of October the 31st of October the 1st of November  
the 2nd of November the 3rd of November the 4th of November  
the 5th of November the 6th of November the 7th of November  
the 8th of November the 9th of November the 10th of November  
the 11th of November the 12th of November the 13th of November  
the 14th of November the 15th of November the 16th of November  
the 17th of November the 18th of November the 19th of November  
the 20th of November the 21st of November the 22nd of November  
the 23rd of November the 24th of November the 25th of November  
the 26th of November the 27th of November the 28th of November  
the 29th of November the 30th of November the 1st of December  
the 2nd of December the 3rd of December the 4th of December  
the 5th of December the 6th of December the 7th of December  
the 8th of December the 9th of December the 10th of December  
the 11th of December the 12th of December the 13th of December  
the 14th of December the 15th of December the 16th of December  
the 17th of December the 18th of December the 19th of December  
the 20th of December the 21st of December the 22nd of December  
the 23rd of December the 24th of December the 25th of December  
the 26th of December the 27th of December the 28th of December  
the 29th of December the 30th of December the 31st of December



as they occurred at the sea side. I might easily have extended this paper to a much greater length by the insertion of cases, and the detail of symptoms occasionally observed; but enough I trust has been said to point out the nature of the complaint. One of the chief objects in writing the above has been to testify to the superior efficacy of Mercury in the treatment of this fever, after the first stage has elapsed.

The practice is not novel. I was informed by a gentleman who had charge of these same wards the preceding summer (at which time this fever was very prevalent and fatal) and I was witness to the fact, that salivation was the only security to the patient, while every other means proved comparatively ineffectual. But in the employment of this remedy a great mistake was committed; it was given in too small a quantity; the patient would often die before the mercury had time to exert its peculiar action, of this circumstance I was soon apprised, which induced me to prescribe the medicine freely as already stated.

It will yet remain for future experience to determine on

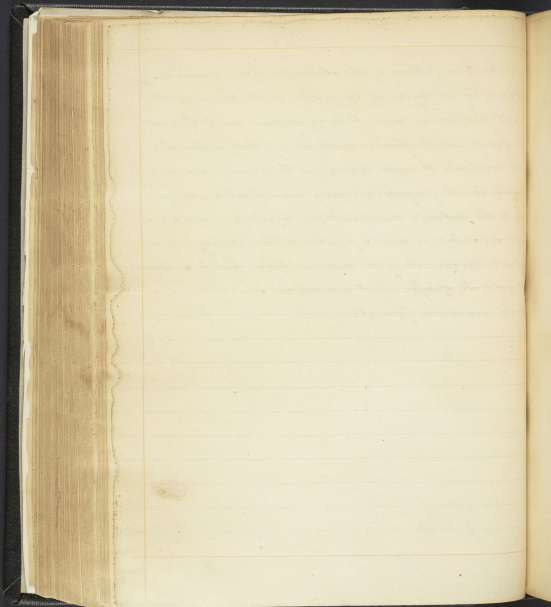




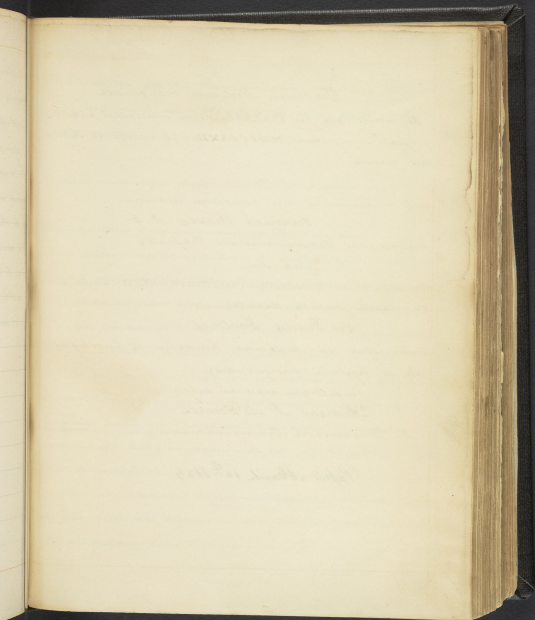


the truth or fallacy of the statements herein mentioned.  
Should the remedy be as successful in the hands of others  
as it has been in mine, I am confident many lives will  
be saved, which otherwise would be infallibly destroyed.  
In conclusion I must observe, as the disease was very  
rapid in its progress, and every hour of delay was greatly  
to the patients disadvantage, the intention was to ex-  
cite salivation as soon as possible, without having any re-  
gard to the quantity of the medicine taken, but to continue  
it, until its specific effect was vinced, short of which, no  
benefit was derived from it.











*Testamen Medicum Inaugurale*

De morbis, qui per Franklinianam comitatum publicam  
graspati sunt, Anno MDCCCXXII inter Martii et Septem-  
bris menses.

guard

sub moderamine viri admodum reverendi

Fredrick Brasley D.D.

Universitatis Pennsylvaniae Praefecti,

huc veni.

ex auctoritate auctoritate praeillustrium, et amplissima  
facultatis medica decretis,

Pro Gradu Doctoris

summiq[ue] in Medicina honoribus et privilegiis  
iura et legitima consequendis;

suditorum examini subijcit

Andreas J. McDowell

De Philadelphiae Pennsylvaniae, — — —

Papad March 12<sup>th</sup> 1823